

completion of the statements by the Senators from Indiana, Connecticut, Minnesota, and any other members of the committee wishing to do so—that at that point, I have 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I have been told it is only going to take a minute to run a hotline on the Democratic side, after which I would like to propound, on behalf of myself and Senator BIDEN, a unanimous consent agreement. This whole matter will take just a minute or so. I would like to, with the consent of my colleagues, get that out of the way here before the debate continues, if the Senator from Vermont finds that acceptable.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, the Senator has this consent request. I hope he will offer it and we can consider it, if the leadership so desires. I would certainly support it. Can't we wait until we get the agreement?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida has the floor.

Mr. KENNEDY. I object then.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, let me restate my unanimous consent, which is that upon the completion of the opening statements of the members of the committee, I be allowed 10 minutes as in morning business for a statement on the wildfires in Florida.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I will not object. I just say to my colleague, I am pleased to speak right after him. I just ask that other colleagues will speak, and I would like to speak after the Senator from Florida.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Connecticut is recognized.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, let me thank my colleague from Florida for his graciousness. For the purposes of getting the opening statements out, it is worthwhile to hear those who have worked over the past year or more to put this piece of legislation together.

Let me begin by commending the distinguished chairman of the committee, Senator JEFFORDS of Vermont, and the distinguished ranking Democrat, Senator KENNEDY, and my colleague from Indiana, Senator COATS, for their tremendous efforts here to put this higher education bill together.

Mr. President, there are very few pieces of legislation that we will consider in this Congress that are as important to American families as the one we take up today.

I see my colleague from Kentucky. Does he wish me to yield?

Mr. McCONNELL. If the Senator will yield for a moment, the unanimous consent agreement has now been cleared.

Mr. DODD. Without interrupting the flow of the debate and without yielding

my right to the floor, for the purposes of propounding the unanimous consent agreement, I will yield to the Senator from Kentucky.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 2282

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 2 p.m. today, the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. 2282, which I send to the desk, and that it be considered under the following agreement: 2 hours on the bill, equally divided between myself and Senator BIDEN or our designees; that no motions or amendments be in order; that following the conclusion or yielding back of the time, the bill be advanced to third reading, and the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the bill, all without any intervening action or debate.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, that has been cleared on the Democratic side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. DODD. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky has the floor. Is there objection?

Mr. KENNEDY. Reserving the right to object—

Mr. DODD. I will object for a moment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Who seeks recognition?

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the 10 minutes I reserved previously be available to me at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida is recognized.

FLORIDA'S FIRE CRISIS

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I am here with a sense of disappointment in that the President of the United States today is visiting my State and, particularly, visiting areas of the State that have recently been ravaged by an unprecedented series of wildfires. I regret that because of the schedule of the Senate, particularly the votes we have just taken this morning and those we will take later in the day, I was unable to accept the President's invitation, which he had generously extended to my colleague, Senator MACK, and myself. Therefore, I would like to take

this opportunity to make a statement to my colleagues as to the circumstances in Florida.

Mr. President, next month—on August 24—Floridians will observe the sixth anniversary of one of the worst natural disasters in recent memory: Hurricane Andrew.

Many of my colleagues will remember that Andrew roared ashore in the middle of the night and vented its fury on the people of South Florida. The storm severely disrupted the lives of thousands of families. It damaged 128,000 homes and left approximately 160,000 people homeless. The insurance industry estimates that Andrew cost our state nearly \$30 billion.

Perhaps even more sobering than these numbers is the knowledge that the devastation and loss of life would have been even worse had the storm struck just twenty miles to the north, in the heart of downtown Miami.

These facts demonstrate the unprecedented nature of Hurricane Andrew's destructive force.

But perhaps even more unprecedented was the tremendous generosity shown by people outside of Florida in the aftermath of Andrew's driving rains and fierce winds. Americans from every corner of our nation put their lives on hold to assist those Floridians whose lives had been turned upside down by Mother Nature. Some sent food and supplies. Others packed up cars, loaded vans, and boarded buses so that they could join relief efforts.

State disaster agencies lent personnel, expertise, and know-how to the Florida Department of Community Affairs in its clean-up efforts.

This enormous outpouring of support by Americans for people they had never met and neighborhoods they had probably never visited reaffirmed our belief in the vitality and essential goodness of the human spirit.

This August, Floridians will remember Hurricane Andrew with another natural disaster on their minds. Since May 24, a deadly combination of intense heat and prolonged drought has sparked more than 2,000 forest fires in Florida's 67 counties. Even for a state that is experienced in dealing with natural disasters, these fires have been spawned during what may be one of the worst years in Florida meteorological history.

In late January and early February—in the midst of our state's dry season—several Northern Florida counties were deluged by massive floods. Not long after, parts of Central Florida were devastated by thunderstorms and tornadoes that are more typical in the summer months.

The fire crisis is the latest example of our state's climactic reversal of fortune in 1998. Florida's hot summer temperatures are typically accompanied by afternoon thunderstorms and tropical weather. This year's heat and drought, and the lush undergrowth and foliage that sprung up in the wake of Florida's unusually wet winter, combined to fuel the fires that have put the

state under a cloud of smoke and chased nearly 112,000 residents from their homes—7,040 of them into emergency shelters.

The numbers that I have just cited, and those that I will provide hereafter, are the result of analyses done by local and State emergency agencies and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

These fires have had severe consequences. More than 350 homes, businesses, or buildings have been destroyed or heavily damaged. Nearly 100 individuals, mostly brave firefighters battling the blazes, have been injured.

Fortunately, as of today there have been no lives lost directly as a result of the wildfires.

A 140-mile stretch of Interstate 95 which was closed for several days was recently reopened. Four hundred and eighty-three thousand acres of land have been burned. As of the current estimate of damage, with higher estimates anticipated as a full economic accounting can be completed, there has been damage sustained of almost \$300 million to private interests and over \$100 million in costs to local, State, and Federal Governments.

In a step never before taken in Florida's long history with violent weather, on Friday of last week every one of the 45,000 residents of Flagler County, a county that is just north of Daytona Beach, had to be evacuated from their homes. That evacuation continued over the Independence Day weekend.

I happened to be with Governor Chiles when he made that mandatory evacuation order. There is no more difficult requirement of a Governor than to order people out of their homes for their safety. Governor Chiles was resolute, he was prompt, he was compassionate in that order, and it no doubt resulted in substantial saving of lives, of potential injuries, and the homes of those persons who were evacuated.

Mr. President, Mother Nature has once again subjected Florida to unprecedented weather conditions.

But with the memories of recent disasters, such as Hurricanes Opal and Andrew, and the aftermath still fresh in our minds, we know that the national response to our pleas for help is anything but unprecedented and are moved by the immediacy of America's heartfelt offers of assistance.

The Clinton Administration and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) moved quickly to ensure that Florida could rely on the federal government as a full partner in its battle against the fires. On June 19, President Clinton declared all 67 Florida counties as a major disaster area and made them eligible for immediate federal financial assistance.

In the weeks following that declaration, FEMA officials have skillfully coordinated relief efforts and worked hard to channel additional aid to the hardest hit areas. We greatly appreciate the continued efforts of FEMA Director James Lee Witt and his agen-

cy. Director Witt has spent much of his six years on the job in the Sunshine State—responding to Hurricane Opal, floods in North Florida, tornadoes in Central Florida, and now fires in every corner of the state.

I commend him and his fellow FEMA employees for their long-standing dedication to helping Floridians recover from Mother Nature's wrath.

But it is not just FEMA that has responded to this crisis. Americans from 44 states are fighting side-by-side with Floridians to prevent these fires from endangering families and engulfing even more homes, businesses, and roads. For example, U.S. Marines, National Guardsmen, and National Weather Service meteorologists from all over the country have converged on Florida. Two hundred and twenty-six firefighters and 53 firefighting vehicles have been airlifted from California, Oregon, and South Dakota, states whose residents are not strangers to violent weather and natural disasters.

North Carolina, a state that is even more heavily forested than my own, has sent 47 fire trucks and 95 firefighters to Florida.

Pennsylvania, which lost more than 2,200 citizens in less than ten minutes during the catastrophic Johnstown flood of 1889, has contributed 80 volunteers to combat this natural disaster in 1998.

So many states have donated equipment that two-thirds of all the firefighting helicopters in the United States are now working in Florida.

Even foreign governments have been eager to lend a hand. As Miami Herald Staff Writer Cyril Zaneski reported on July 4th, the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario "offered firefighting tanker planes capable of dropping about 9,500 gallons of water an hour and refilling their tanks without landing."

I am pleased to announce that the Herculean efforts of these brave firefighters have not been in vain. The tide is turning.

Over the last few days, those Floridians who were forced from their homes have returned. Most of the fires have been brought under control. Meteorologists are predicting lower temperatures and more rain in the coming days. We have not reached the end of this crisis—but I am hopeful that this good news marks the beginning of the end.

Before I conclude today, I want to share a story that I think demonstrates why Floridians are so grateful for the efforts of our friends from around the nation.

An article in the Columbus Dispatch on July 6 chronicled the efforts of two Ohio firefighters in Central Florida. I'd like to read part of that article, and I ask that the full text be included in the RECORD.

Around every corner, behind every door and over every store counter, the stories just keep coming—stories of gratitude to the men and women who have come from all over to stare down an inferno.

There's the woman originally from Maine who invited all Maine firefighters to stay with her.

There's the firefighter from Western Florida who, try as he might, wasn't permitted to pay for a pair of boots at Wal-Mart.

There's the laundry owner from nearby DeLeon Springs who offered to wash buckets full of sooty, sweaty socks.

And then there's the free eye drops and sunblock, the free bottled water and Gatorade by the truckload, the free food cooked up in every possible pot, from residents' kitchens to popular restaurants.

Mark Puhl, a firefighter from Nelsonville, Ohio, who arrived in Deland with a relief crew Saturday night, got an early taste of the appreciation. "Usually response like this comes through toward the end of a job," he said. "But we had people in the airport thanking us in advance."

His colleague, Lea Ann Parsley of Granville, Ohio, understood. The wildfires she typically fights are in sparsely populated areas out West. "We're usually protecting timber," she said. "Here we're protecting people's homes. It hits home a lot more."

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Columbus Dispatch]

FLORIDIANS TEND TO FIREFIGHTERS—FROM HAIRCUTS TO BOOTS, IT'S ALL 'ON THE HOUSE'

DELAND, FLA. (AP)—Around every corner, behind every door and over every store counter, the stories just keep coming—stories of gratitude to the men and women who have come from all over to stare down an inferno.

There's the woman originally from Maine who invited all Maine firefighters to stay with her. There's the firefighter from western Florida who, try as he might, wasn't permitted to pay for a pair of boots at Wal-Mart. There's the laundry owner from nearby DeLeon Springs who offered to wash buckets full of sooty, sweaty socks.

And there's the free eye drops and sunblock, the free bottled water and Gatorade by the truckload, the free food cooked up in every possible pot, from residents' kitchens to DeLand's most popular restaurants.

"It's the only fire I've ever fought and gained weight," joked Jacob Wilkerson, a 29-year-old DeLand firefighter who has been attacking flames since Memorial Day.

DeLand, a town at the edge of disaster, might well adopt a Dalmatian as its mascot. In these jumbled, sweaty, smoky days, it has become a firefighters' community.

The town of 16,000, about 30 miles north of Orlando, is just beyond the area that the Florida wildfires have hit the hardest.

On the road, practically every third car is an emergency vehicle, some from as far as Canada, Colorado, California. Motels not jammed with evacuees from adjacent Flagler County are filled with firefighters, as are the dorms at Stetson University.

Signs—on store marquees and hand-stenciled on plywood, on towels, on bedsheets, on cardboard—are everywhere. Most say thanks; some simply tell firefighters to hang in there.

"We luv ya," says the Farm Bureau Insurance sign east of town. "Thank you for saving our home," said another, farther north.

It's understandable. DeLand has been choked for days by a haze of acrid smoke. Everyone realizes that if it's this bad here, it's far worse on the fire line.

"If it's difficult for us, what are they facing?" said Carlos Esquivel, 18, who just graduated from DeLand High School. "They could die out there."

Similar sentiments are heard in other fire's-edge towns. In Ormond Beach, on the Atlantic Coast, Tim Curtis has turned his restaurant, Houligan's, into a veritable arcade for firefighters, offering everything from massages to haircuts.

Here in DeLand, firefighters are astonished at the massive outpouring.

"I've never been to a place where their towns are burning down and they're worried about us," said Mike Caldaro, a firefighter from western Florida just back from a 23-hour workday.

He is one of 200 firefighters staying at Stetson University, which opened its dormitories for firefighters. His colleague, Edward Osborne, fought fires so hot they melted his thermal boots. When he went to Wal-Mart to buy more, the cashier handed back his money.

"She gave me my boots and she gave me a hug. I needed both," Osborne said.

Mark Puhl, a firefighter from Nelsonville, Ohio, who arrived in DeLand with a relief crew Saturday night, got an early taste of the appreciation.

"Usually response like this comes through toward the end of a job," he said. "But we had people in the airport thanking us in advance."

His colleague, Lea Ann Parsley of Granville, Ohio, understood. The wildfires she typically fights are in sparsely populated areas out West.

"We're usually protecting timber," she said. "Here we're protecting people's homes. It hits home a lot more."

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I am very pleased that the President of the United States is going to Florida today, meeting with the victims and thanking the firefighters for their valiant effort.

Mr. President, I have lived in Florida for more than sixty-one years.

In that time, I have never observed wildfires as widespread and unmanageable as those that have plagued our state for the last forty-four days.

On behalf of over 14 million Floridians, I offer my deepest thanks to the thousands of Americans who have voluntarily left their homes and risked their lives so that our state's fire victims might not lose theirs.

They are true heroes, and all of us who proudly call Florida our home are forever in their debt.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. JEFFORDS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I yield to the Senator from Kentucky for the purpose of a unanimous consent request.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I thank the Senator from Vermont.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—S. 2282

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this agreement has been cleared on both sides.

I ask unanimous consent that at 2 p.m. today the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. 2282, which is at the desk, and it be considered under the following agreement:

Two hours on the bill to be equally divided between myself and Senator

BIDEN, or our designees; that no motions or amendments be in order except those agreed to by both managers; and that following the conclusion or yielding back of time, the bill be advanced to third reading and the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the bill, all without intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I thank the Senator from Vermont.

Mr. DODD addressed the Chair.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I will proceed as I started earlier. I apologize to my colleagues for the minor interruption. I wanted to make a correction on that unanimous consent agreement.

HIGHER EDUCATION AMENDMENTS OF 1998

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, There are few pieces of legislation as important to American families as the bill we take up today—the Higher Education Amendments of 1998.

I have been pleased and honored to work with the chairman and the ranking member of the Labor and Human Resources Committee, and with Senator COATS of Indiana to put this bill together over the last year. I appreciate the tremendous effort of Senator JEFFORDS, Senator KENNEDY and Senator COATS on this bill, which is going to move I think rather expeditiously. There will be some amendments, but it is a tribute to the efforts of the membership of this group and their staff that we have reached a point where we have this very, very important piece of legislation that has achieved as much harmony as it has. So I begin these brief remarks by commending them and the staff members who have put this bill together. And, together, we bring to the floor today a strong, bipartisan bill—a bill that American families need and deserve.

Mr. President, America has long been known as the land of promise. We take great pride in that as Americans. Those words are used at every national holidays—"a land of promise." I think the foundation of that promise has been, during the more than two centuries of our existence as a nation, education. A democracy as complicated, as sophisticated, and as subtle as ours could not succeed without an educated population. Education is also the root of our economic strength. Without an educated population, you cannot remain on the cutting edge of industry and business.

I think any successful national endeavor you talk about, Education is a critical factor in its success. It is the central theme that has created the kind of opportunity and success this Nation has enjoyed for so many years—particularly, I would add, higher education. This is no secret. Parents recognize that their child's success is, in

no small measure, dependent on his or her educational achievement. Statistics bear this out. A person with a college degree earns twice as much as one with just a high school education.

But this issue is not only a concern of families. Higher education has also, as I said a moment ago, defined and shaped America's economy in the post-World War II era. Our economy has grown on the strength of knowledge-based, highly skilled industries and workers. This would not have been possible without our unparalleled network of universities and colleges and our Federal commitment to ensuring access to these institutions of higher learning.

Since the GI bill, millions of Americans have been able to attend college because of the assistance of their Federal Government. Today, in fact, 75 percent of all student aid is Federal.

Unfortunately, families increasingly worry that college is slipping beyond their grasp as college costs rise and student debt mounts. Studies suggest that even with the nearly \$35 billion of Federal aid available each year, affordability is a significant factor for those at all income levels. For middle-income families, college costs are shaping students' decisions about where to attain their higher education and what type of careers they intend to pursue. For the neediest of students in our country, affordability of education is already affecting the fundamental decision of whether to attend higher education at all.

We cannot discuss the Higher Education Act, which is centrally about ensuring access to higher education, without discussing cost. I firmly believe that the choice of an institution, the choice of a career, and the choice of whether to attend college at all should not be based alone on the issue of cost—and for too many families today, it is.

Let's face it. Families are increasingly unable to cope with the cost increases that we see in higher education. According to a survey conducted by the American Council on Education, the public worries a great deal about the cost of attending college. They believe that college is too expensive, and they think that the cost can be brought down without affecting academic quality.

When asked what concerned them most about their children's well-being, respondents across this country in all income groups ranked paying for college as the second biggest concern. Their largest concern was use of illegal drugs. But right behind that was the cost of a higher education.

Today, 4 years at one of our Nation's leading colleges can easily total well over \$120,000. Estimates are that the family of a child born today who might enter college at age 18 in the year 2016 could easily be looking at a cost of well over \$250,000 for 4 years of college education at one of our nation's leading universities. In nearly all families, a